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AN
A C C O U N T
OF THE
P R O C E E D I N G S
AT THE
G E N E R A L M E E T I N G
OF THE
C O U N T Y O F Y O R K

Held on the 10th. of February, 1785.

TOGETHER WITH
A SUMMARY OF THE SPEECHES
AT THAT MEETING.

Y O R K;

PRINTED BY A. WARD, IN CONEY-STREET.

THE
ACCOUNT
OF THE
PROCEEDINGS
AT THE
GENERAL MEETING
OF THE



COUNTY OF NEW YORK
Held at the
TOGETHER WITH
A SUMMARY OF THE SPEECHES
AT THAT MEETING

Y O R K
PRINTED BY A. WARD, IN CANTONMENT

A N
A C C O U N T
O F T H E
P R O C E E D I N G S, &c.

AT a GENERAL MEETING of the FREEHOLDERS of the COUNTY of YORK, held at the CASTLE of YORK, on Thursday the 10th day of February, 1785, in pursuance of notice given by the Sheriff of the said County, agreeable to the requisition of a very respectable body of Freeholders, the following Petition was unanimously agreed to :

To the HONOURABLE *the* COMMONS *of* GREAT BRITAIN, *in Parliament assembled.*

The HUMBLE PETITION *of the* FREEHOLDERS *of the* COUNTY *of* YORK.

S H E W E T H,

THAT your Petitioners, sensible of the original excellence of the Constitution of this Country, most ardently wish to have it maintained upon the genuine principles on which it was founded.

Your Petitioners further shew that it is necessary to the Welfare of the People, that the Commons' House of Parliament should have a common interest with the Nation, and that in the present state of the Representation of the People in Parliament, the Commons of this realm are partially and inadequately represented,

and consequently cannot have that security for their liberties, which it is the aim of the Constitution to give them.

Your Petitioners therefore most humbly supplicate this Honourable House, to take into their most serious consideration the present inadequate state of the Representation of the People in Parliament, and to apply such remedy to this great Constitutional evil as to this Honourable House may seem meet.

And your Petitioners shall ever pray, &c.

Resolved unanimously, That the Petition now read shall be signed by the Sheriff and any of the Freeholders present, who approve thereof, on behalf of themselves and the other Freeholders of this County.

Resolved, That the Members for this County be desired to present to Parliament the Petition now adopted.

Resolved unanimously, That the thanks of this Assembly be given to the High-Sheriff for his ready compliance with the wishes of the County in calling this Meeting, and for his impartial conduct on this day.

WILLIAM DANBY, SHERIFF,

*The following is a SUMMARY ACCOUNT of the
SPEECHES at the Meeting:*

THE Petition was moved by Gen. St. LEGER, who expressed his great pleasure in the zeal which actuated the County to persevere in pursuing the great object of a Parliamentary Reformation; he congratulated himself on having an opportunity, in so full and respectable a Meeting of the Freeholders of Yorkshire,
of

of joining his voice to theirs to promote a measure so necessary to the recovery of the British Constitution.

Mr. CHALONER seconded the motion.

Mr. H. DUNCOMBE then rose. He congratulated his Constituents on the probable success of a measure which originated in this County, and which promises to prove so contributory to the public welfare. He reflected on the misconduct of former Ministers, and thence inferred that their resistance to the means of removing corruption, by which alone they had governed, though a subject of regret, could by no means excite our wonder. He observed, that as measures were the only just criterion of Ministers, so it was no bad earnest of a Minister when he called for a canvas of his conduct, and referred himself to the People, whose part it is to control and punish Ministers. The distress of this Country he considered as a sufficient proof of the necessity of a Parliamentary Reformation; and calling to recollection the impolicy of those measures which had been pursued during the last twelve unhappy years, declared, that though their effects had been predicted, yet they were obstinately pursued by an Administration which was weakly, implicitly, and servilely supported by Parliament; a Parliament which, unfaithful to its trust, had either slept on duty, or treacherously betrayed it to the enemy. He remarked the serious and steady temper which the People had at length been roused to assume, and was pleased to find the Country in a disposition to be no farther trifled with; the caprices of a Minister were no longer to be acquiesced in; no farther compliance with his ruinous projects could be submitted to: Had an equal spirit actuated the Public some years ago, and had they been able to impress their sense upon Parliament then, a war, unjust

in its principles, and ruinous in its consequences, would have either been entirely prevented, or brought to an earlier period. He rejoiced, however, in the prospects that now open. He saw better principles revive, and hoped for better consequences from them. He considered all other means of retrieving the Public and preserving its Constitution as futile and nugatory, and relied on an amended Representation of the People in Parliament; this alone he looked on as effectual, permanent, and exempt from vicissitude and change.

He then turned to the resources of this Country, and affirmed that the experience of the last year has proved that they are not exhausted quite. The suppression of that illicit trade, which grew out of our late system of finance, opens a fairer prospect. The taxes which have been lately imposed, he acknowledged were heavy, but they were necessary too; they were not imposed for new destructive projects; their purpose was to liquidate a debt of thirty millions of money, the last sad legacy of calamity bequeathed by a wretched Ministry to this unhappy Country. The measures that are now pursued originate in consummate acknowledged abilities and integrity. The amendment of our Representation is now the measure of a Government which does not require corruption to justify its conduct; and an amended Representation augurs prosperity to the Country.

Mr. JOHN MILNES. As I was ever an advocate for the business of this day, I heartily congratulate you upon a greater prospect of success; and I am happy to think that the conduct of many of us, at the late County Address-Meeting, has greatly gained us the confidence of those who were before fearful of our proceedings; we then convinced them we were equally friends to the just Prerogatives of the Crown and the Liberties of the People; indeed the necessity of a Parliamentary Re-
form

form seems to be more generally allowed of than ever. No where, in my opinion, is there a more glaring instance of the defective state of our Representation, than in the manufacturing part of the West-Riding of this County: A manufactory (*the cloathing manufactory*) which employs some hundred thousands of people, and brings in to the Country upwards of Three Millions sterling annually, yet sends not one single Member to Parliament, nor has any Representative there, unless you will except those who are sent by the County at large. How disproportionate this, when many small towns and villages, and those also under influence, send each two Members to Parliament.

Mr. Chairman, I now beg leave to intreat Gentlemen's indulgence to a circumstance which passed at the late County Address-Meeting, for it seems that part of Col. Thornton's speech relating to me, was so much misunderstood, that an idea has gone forth that I had the title of a Baronet offered me to support the Address: As I was conscious of having had no such offer made me, or of ever having told Col. Thornton so, I immediately after the meeting waited upon Col. Thornton for an explanation, who declared that what he had alluded to, was a conversation which had passed three years before, and which I can assure you was intended as no other than a joke. Col. Thornton moreover declared that he was extremely sorry for having made mention of it, and that he meant no kind of offence to me whatsoever. I again had a conversation with Col. Thornton, and his apology was very full and satisfactory. My having left the wall of the Castle-yard along with Sir W. Foulis, Mr. Banks, and others, to get some refreshment, before Col. Thornton made that part of his speech relating to me, will, I hope, apologize for this intrusion.

Earl

Earl FAUCONBERG declared himself ambitious of the attention of so respectable and numerous a Meeting of the Freeholders of the County. Though a Peer of the Realm, he considered himself at liberty to express his wishes to see the Representation of the People put upon a better footing, and also his confidence in those who have now the honour to be called to his Majesty's Councils, and whom he is happy to see enjoy the concurrent approbation of both the Crown and People. He congratulated the County upon a Representative, (Mr. Duncombe) whose integrity, solidity, attention, and judgment did honour to their choice, and whom he considered as a kind of balance to the defects of our Representation. He abjured all Republican ideas; the example of 1658, however, he thought, deserved attention; for at that time Representatives were added to the Counties, and also to the Commercial Towns. His Lordship then adverted to the improvement of our Revenues, in consequence of the new laws and regulations to restrain the illicit practice of Smuggling; and affirmed that in the year 1784 the Customs had increased 400,000*l.* and the Excise no less than a Million. He also declared that, instead of being against us, Exchange was now 9 and $9\frac{1}{2}$ per Cent. in our favour. Tea, which had been formerly smuggled into Britain by our enemies with a view to distress us, and which had actually effected a loss to the Revenue of 2,000,000*l.* per annum, was now imported by our own commercial companies; by which means that sum of 2,000,000*l.* which would otherwise have gone to France, now flows into our own coffers under the conduct and auspices of better Ministers, whose views, extending beyond the little considerations of places and emoluments, comprehend both our Constitutional and Commercial Interests; under the direction of that virtuous
and

and able Young Man, who not only is, but has the prospect of long continuing, the Minister of this Country. With so much good in view, therefore, and with persons placed in responsible situations by the act of the Sovereign and applause of the People, we should bear as men, for a while, those burdens which are unfortunately, but necessarily, laid upon us. Our Resources thus increase, and our Manufactures, particularly in the West-Riding, will improve; the restraints on Smuggling will save to this country that great quantity of Wool that has been carried out to our enemies the French, and which they have occasion for to work up that of their own nation, and consequently prevent their being our rivals in that branch of trade; our Shipping will increase, and with it our Naval Strength. Let us then with a sober patience for a little while expect the benefits of these measures, and our confidence will be necessarily confirmed.

Mr. R. S. MILNES could not suppress his entire satisfaction in seeing the present Meeting. The conduct of the Freeholders, he observed, had realized the public esteem in which they were universally held. He expressed his high opinion of the present Minister; but still recommended to them not to rely on any Minister, however well disposed, but to place their confidence only in that which could not deceive them, and must be lasting—a Reformation of Parliament. What the consequence of their application to the House of Commons would be he could not tell; he therefore urged them, at all events, to persevere in this pursuit; and declared, that if they should even be foiled now, when the prospect is so fair, it was his determined resolution never to abandon the measure.

Mr.

Mr. WYVILL. I will address myself to you in a few words only. As the County of York has taken so decided a part in favour of Parliamentary Reformation, against every effort of a corrupt Government to suppress their feelings, it would be truly surprising if the Freeholders had remained inactive on this occasion, when Government takes so decided a part in its favour. I think, therefore, the County is much obliged to those Gentlemen who signed the Requisition; and still more so to the worthy High Sheriff, who, by complying with their request, has once more given us an opportunity to declare our sentiments upon the question.

The Petition before you has my hearty approbation; it had also the approbation of the County in two successive meetings; but unexceptionable as it appears to me, there may be Gentlemen who are not yet fully convinced of its propriety, though they have not risen to express their dissent. The question has been so ably discussed on former occasions, and so much has been said in favour of Reformation on the true Grounds of Government, and the Principles of our Constitution, that I despair of being able to throw any new light on the subject in that general View: I therefore wish to confine my observations to some recent facts that have happened since the last Petition was presented to Parliament, which seem to afford new arguments for the measure, or to confirm the old.

The late heavy burdens, which have been unavoidably imposed on the public, present one strong argument for Parliamentary Reformation. Five years ago this country, and the kingdom at large, groaning under the pressure of calamity, stood forward to petition Parliament for an Oeconomical Reform, and very intelligibly implied its earnest wish for the

the discontinuance of the American War. The sense of the country was then very well understood to be against that War: It was impossible Parliament could mistake it; yet, from an improper leaning towards the Minister, Parliament refused to comply. The war was therefore protracted for two years more, at an expence exceeding *Fifty Millions*; and by this treachery to the public, a necessity was incurr'd for those heavy burdens, which have been imposed by two successive administrations for the last two years. Parliament therefore requires Reformation; for if Parliament could support a Minister in the prosecution of a war against the manifest sense of the people, what reason have we to trust that future Parliaments may not support a Minister in commencing a war against the sense of the people. If the spirit of liberty, therefore, were extinct in this country; if the people were dead to every sense of their Constitutional Rights, yet, in an æconomical view only, it would be their interest to support a Parliamentary Reformation.

A still stronger argument arises out of the late East-India Bill, and the disputes consequent upon it. By touching on this delicate subject, it is far from my intention to provoke a debate foreign to the question before the Meeting; still less do I mean to give the smallest offence to those Gentlemen who hold sentiments on the subject different from my own. I have experienced their candour on many occasions; I respect their general principles, and I hope I shall not give any personal offence, as it is my purpose studiously to avoid it. On the one hand Gentlemen complain, that the privileges of the House of Commons have been violated by the Minister's staying in office after that house had declared its want of confidence in him; they lament the fallen dignity of that house; they lament that it has lost the

the antient confidence of the public. How is this fact to be accounted for, but by admitting that the suspicion of Parliamentary Corruption has become general? The nation knew that, in numerous instances, a few great Lords appointed their deputies to sit in that house, and that many more were returned to parliament by the little venal boroughs. They felt themselves only the nominal constituent of parliament, and thence inferred, that no common interest subsisting between Parliament and the body of the Nation, Parliament might act a part directly opposite to the sense and interest of the nation. And hence again the facility with which the opposers of the India Bill impressed the public with the almost universal sense of its dangerous consequence, and the necessity of supporting the Minister of the crown against an unfaithful Parliament. The confidence of the nation, therefore, can only be restored to Parliament by the success of the measure which has been now proposed to you. On the other hand, many think the India Bill a measure big with the most dangerous consequences: By vesting the influence of that great Commercial Company in a few aristocratical persons, a new power would have been created unknown to the Constitution, and utterly subversive of it; an aristocracy would have been formed, which, aided by the treasury of Bengal, would have been able, and perhaps willing, to degrade the Crown to the ground, and trample also the rights and privileges of the People under their feet. This danger is, for the present, escaped; but if the abuses of Representation remain uncorrected, it may soon return again. Faction and corrupt majorities may be formed once more; against these therefore we must guard: For if these should at any time succeed, the due balance of the Constitution must be for ever overturned. There was a time when the danger of Innovation was much insisted on by cool and cautious men, and it is

is not surprising, while measures of such magnitude are agitated by private individuals only, or assemblies of the people, that fears of this nature should have their weight with men of moderate or timid tempers. I have the pleasure, however, to observe, that Innovation is no longer considered but as a visionary fear: For when the measure is taken up by Government itself; when a plan of Reformation is proposed by a Minister who has proved himself a friend to the Constitution in all its branches, it is impossible to suppose that any change can be intended, by which the lawful power of the crown would be impaired, or the just and antient rights of the people be invaded. The improved prospect of success is another argument which strongly persuades the adoption of this measure; for when can a petition be more seasonable than at a time when there is every reason to believe it will receive the support even of Government itself?—The public is well apprized that I have had the honour of having some communication with Mr. Pitt; but what I say on this topic, I do not bring forward on any authority, but merely collect from what is equally notorious to the public as to myself. From the last clause in the King's Speech, explained as it was by Mr. Pitt's comment upon it in the House of Commons, it is manifest that the cabinet does not disapprove of Mr. Pitt's intention *honestly and boldly, as a Man and as a Minister*, to support a Parliamentary Reformation, otherwise we should have heard of dissensions in the cabinet; but this not having been the case, it is just to infer the probability of their support. Thus future factions and corrupt combinations of men will be cut off, the Crown will be safe, and the People gratified in their dearest wish. Many other parts of the kingdom, I have no doubt, will concur in the measures of this county; but if the people of England should be so lost
to

to every sense of just policy, as to disregard the fate of a question, in which all their most valuable interests are involved, the honour of having supported that question to the last will belong exclusively to Yorkshire, and the spirit of the English People at large must be acknowledged to be lost. But I augur no such ill—you will be well followed by the nation—Parliament will take the measure from you—the Minister will press it upon Parliament—Representation will be reformed—and the Constitution will be saved.

On Saturday the 12th instant, at a general and very numerous Meeting of the Freemen and Inhabitants of the City of York, convened, in compliance with a requisition, by the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor at the Guildhall, a similar Petition was agreed to, and addressed “to the Honourable the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, and praying them to take into their most serious consideration, the present inadequate Representation of the People in Parliament, and to apply such remedy to that alarming evil as to them may seem meet.”—Both in County and City there prevailed the most perfect unanimity in the pursuit of this vast Constitutional object,

